

**Protecting San Diego's Water Supply
Council President Scott Peters, First District
For the La Jolla Village News, August 2007**

2007 is shaping up to be one of the driest years in San Diego in recent history. While the city's usual annual rainfall is around 10 inches, so far this year we've seen under four inches. The historic dry conditions, combined with threatened cutbacks to our imported water, place even greater pressure on the region to be water wise.

The City of San Diego and the County Water Authority recently issued the "20 Gallon Challenge," asking residents to conserve 20 gallons of water per day. The small decisions we make to save water reduce the likelihood of mandatory water cutbacks.

San Diegans have made water conservation a way of life, but additional steps are needed to preserve and expand the region's water supply. Close to 90% of the water we use comes from outside the region, much of it traveling south from the Sierra Nevada. In order to comply with court orders to preserve the delta smelt, an endangered fish that lives in the San Joaquin River Delta, water officials in Northern California propose cutbacks in the amount of water sent to Southern California. San Diego could lose 25% of its water supply.

For years, elected officials have debated ways to increase the amount of water obtained locally, to reduce our dependence on imported water. For years, concerns about cost and the public's unease have scuttled plans to expand water recycling. We no longer have the luxury of time. We must act soon to ensure a sustainable water supply for our region.

The County Grand Jury recently chided the City for dragging its feet on the plan to add highly-treated recycled water into the City's reservoirs. I have long been a proponent of this plan. It's not a new or unnatural concept. Every drop of water on the earth is recycled, having fed, bathed and sustained our ancestors for millennia. Decades of scientific research have shown that the use of highly treated recycled water is safe, and poses no threat to public health. Cities and water districts across the country use super-treated water to augment their water supply, including San Jose, Irvine and Denver.

The scarcity of clean, fresh water is reflected in the price we pay for it. The water we import from outside the region passes through the pipes of many water agencies, each of whom charge us for that privilege. Last month, the County Water Authority announced that it would raise its fees for all member agencies, including the City of San Diego. This cost increase was not included in the rate package approved by Council earlier this year, as at that time, we did not yet know how much more the County Water Authority would charge us for the water it provides to City residents.

You should receive a notice in your water bill alerting you to this new fee. A detachable reply card will be included, if you wish to respond. In October, the City Council will vote on this new rate adjustment.

At the same time, there will be some good news for consumers. The Council will vote to approve a court settlement which reduces the water bill for approximately 97% of residential water users. The \$40 million dollar settlement should result in a savings of around \$3.25 per month for affected users. This more than offsets the increase triggered by the County Water Authority.

I plan to work with my Council colleagues this year to convene a series of community meetings aimed at building public support for water recycling programs. I hope you will join us!

For more information on water rates, conservation and water recycling, visit the City's website, www.sandiego.gov/water.